



## **CITY OF ROCKWALL STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOP) PUBLIC EMERGENCY WARNING SYSTEMS**

### **PURPOSE & OVERVIEW**

The primary objective of City of Rockwall Public Emergency Warning Systems is to issue timely information to individuals concerning impending or imminent severe weather, special emergency situations, public advisory notifications, or special events. This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) describes the City of Rockwall's two primary Public Emergency Warning Systems - Outdoor Warning Sirens and Nixle – and establishes procedures for their use. In addition, this SOP provides important definitions and pertinent information.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Local Warning Point (LWP):** Two Local Warning Points (LWP) exist within the City of Rockwall related to setting off/sounding the outdoor emergency warning sirens. The primary LWP for siren activation is in the Rockwall Police Department's Communications Center (205 W. Rusk Street), which operates twenty-four hours a day. A secondary/"back-up" LWP is located within Rockwall Fire Station #1 (305 E. Boydston Avenue).

The LWP relative to NIXLE is the Rockwall County Office of Emergency Management (OEM).

**Nixle:** Nixle is a notification network that allows registered users to receive urgent alerts and severe weather information, such as tornado warnings, via email and/or text message. Nixle alerts may be initiated on behalf of the City of Rockwall through the Rockwall County Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Nixle is meant to be an additional resource for the public to receive urgent notifications. Although Nixle is most commonly utilized to notify users of severe weather-related events, it may also be utilized to send important information regarding other threats, including but not limited to, such things as train derailments, major traffic accidents, grass fires, gas leaks, and power outages.

**Reliable Source:** For purposes of this SOP, a "reliable source" for either sounding outdoor warning sirens or sending information via Nixle is a representative of the National Weather Service (NWS), the city's designated Emergency Management Coordinator, the city's police/fire/public works/parks field personnel, a member of the Rockwall County Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES), the Rockwall

County Office of Emergency Management, or the city or county Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

**Severe Thunderstorm:** This is a thunderstorm that may produce a tornado, winds of at least 58 mph (50 knots), and/or hail at least 1" in diameter. Structural wind damage may imply the occurrence of a severe thunderstorm. A thunderstorm wind equal to or greater than 40 mph (35 knots) and/or hail of at least 1" is defined as approaching "severe."

**Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** This is issued by the NWS when either a severe thunderstorm is indicated by NWS radar or a spotter reports a thunderstorm producing hail one inch or larger in diameter and/or winds equal to or exceeding 58 miles an hour. People in the affected area should seek safe shelter immediately, as these storms can produce tornadoes with little or no advance warning. Lightning frequency is not a criteria for issuing a severe thunderstorm warning. They are usually issued for a duration of one hour and may be issued without a Severe Thunderstorm Watch being already in effect.

**Severe Weather Outlook(s):** These originate from the NWS and provide a forecast of possible weather events in the North Texas area. The city or county's Emergency Management-related personnel may disseminate such information to key personnel via e-mail; however, generally no specific action is required.

**Tornado Warning:** This is issued by the NWS when a tornado is indicated on radar or sighted by spotters. People in the affected area should seek safe shelter immediately. Warnings may be issued without a Tornado Watch being already in effect. They are usually issued for a duration of approximately 30 minutes; however, this timeframe may be affected by updated information provided by reliable sources.

**Tornado Watch:** This is issued by the National Weather Service when conditions are favorable for the development of tornadoes in and close to the watch area(s). Geographical area for these watches may vary depending on the weather situation. They are usually issued for a duration of 4 to 8 hours and are normally issued well in advance of the actual occurrence of severe weather. During the watch, people should review tornado safety rules and be prepared to move a place of safety if threatening weather approaches.

**Weather Watches:** These are issued by the NWS when the risk of a hazardous weather or hydrologic event has increased significantly, but its occurrence, location, and/or timing is still uncertain. It is intended to provide enough lead time so that those who need to set certain plans in motion may do so and so that key personnel may be "weather aware" in advance of any potential weather-related warning.

**Weather Warnings:** These are issued by the NWS when a hazardous weather or hydrologic event is occurring, is imminent, or has a very high probability of occurring. A warning is used for a specific geographical area for conditions posing a threat to life or property.

**Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) (As Authorized by City):**

Certain Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) officers may be asked to sit in the dispatch office during severe weather events for the purpose of providing up-to-date, expeditious, and reliable weather-related information to public safety officials. RACES officers must be preapproved and receive proper credentialing from the Police Lieutenant in charge of Dispatch in advance of sitting in the communications/dispatch office during severe weather.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**NIXLE**

Nixle allows for ongoing communication about events that directly affect residents in the City of Rockwall and the Rockwall County area. To receive Nixle texts on mobile devices, users must “sign up” by texting their zip code to 888-777. To sign up for e-mail notifications, users must visit [www.nixle.com](http://www.nixle.com). Members of the public are encouraged to continue use of other resources, such as weather radios and local news media outlets, for urgent weather-related notifications.

The Rockwall County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) utilizes the following guidelines regarding use of Nixle:

- Rockwall County OEM is responsible for the issuance of notifications.
- Rockwall County OEM will send alert notifications on behalf of any Public Safety Agency.
- All Weather Warnings/Watches/Advisories will be sent upon notification of the National Weather Service, unless a report is received by credible source that there is an immediate weather threat.
- All “Alert” messages will be issued as quickly as possible, 24 hours a day. In the event that an alert is cancelled prior to the deadline or situation is resolved, a notification will be sent to users. Alert messages will be sent via Text Message and Email.
- Advisory Messages may be sent via Text Message and/or Email, depending on the situation and the time of the occurrence. For example, a tornado watch will be issued during nighttime hours, while a major traffic accident may not be issued during that same time period.
- Community messages will be sent via Email during normal daytime hours.

The Rockwall County Office of Emergency Management will issue the following types of Nixle alerts on behalf of the City of Rockwall:

- Alert Messages (Urgent Information) – Weather Warnings, Hazardous Materials Incident or other emergency requiring people to evacuate or shelter in place.
- Advisory Messages (Important Information) – Weather Watch/Advisory, Major Accidents (involving main roadways), Significant Roadway Closures, Amber or Silver Alerts.
- Community Messages (Informational) – Special Events or Disaster Preparedness Educational Events.

## **OUTDOOR WARNING SIRENS**

The Outdoor Warning Siren System provides warning within the corporate limits of the City of Rockwall. The system is designed to alert individuals who are outdoors to seek shelter indoors, away from the impending threat. Rockwall's siren system is comprised of 14 warning sirens, strategically placed throughout the City limits, with new sirens being periodically added, as needed, as the city grows. One of Rockwall's sirens also serves residents of the City of Heath. Outdoor Emergency Warning Sirens are not intended to be heard indoors, although some residents/businesses may be able to hear them indoors, depending on their location and sound-related circumstances. The primary LWP for siren activation is the Rockwall Police Communications ("dispatch") center. A secondary LWP is located at Rockwall Fire Station #1 and shall only be utilized for siren activation in the event of a failure of the primary LWP. Activation of the siren system shall occur at the request of an authorized official named below.

### **Authorization**

For specific time-sensitive emergency situations, the City of Rockwall Police Communication Center has been delegated authority to determine if warning sirens need to be sounded immediately for public safety. For all other situations, the Communication Center must coordinate with one of the designated key officials who will determine if warning sirens should be sounded and provide approval for their activation. Any official from the City Manager's office may authorize activation of the siren system. Individuals authorized to request activation of the Outdoor Warning Siren System, in order of succession, include the following:

1. Emergency Management Coordinator
2. Fire Chief
3. Assistant Fire Chief
4. Fire Captain
5. Police Chief
6. Assistant Police Chief
7. Highest Ranking Police or Fire Officer on Duty
8. Dispatch Supervisor or highest ranking communications staff member

City of Rockwall's Primary LWP shall activate the Outdoor Warning Siren System without prior authorization from an official noted above when a report(s) of significant, imminent severe weather affecting the City of Rockwall is received from a reliable source (see definition above). Dispatch shall also sound the sirens without prior authorization from an official noted above when the National Weather Service (NWS) issues a TORNADO WARNING for Rockwall County or a SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING that includes wind in excess of 70 mph and / or hail 1" or larger in diameter.

### **Events that Warrant Siren Activation**

Several events warrant activation of the Outdoor Warning Sirens, including but not limited to:

- NWS issues a Tornado **Warning** (not a Watch) for Rockwall County
- Tornadoic activity has been reported by a reliable source with a storm track towards the City of Rockwall.

- Tornado activity has been reported by a reliable source within the City of Rockwall.
- Hail 1” or larger has been reported by a reliable source.
- Severe Thunderstorm Warning with wind speeds of 70 mph (or higher) has been reported by a reliable source.
- Impending attack, actual attack, or accidental missile launch against the United States.

## **Assignment of Responsibility**

### **Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC)**

The City’s designated Emergency Management Coordinator shall monitor possible severe weather threats by utilizing all or some of the following sources to determine when it is necessary to activate the Outdoor Warning Sirens:

- Local radar
- National Weather Service (NWS) resources
- RACES ham radio or radio officer(s)
- NOAA weather radio
- Local media broadcasts (radio and/or television)
- Verified, reliable sources (as defined above)

If a severe weather event is imminent for the City of Rockwall, the EMC shall notify all department directors and supervisors of the threat via text messaging and/or via email thru the city’s Outlook software. It is the responsibility of the director and/or supervisor to disseminate warning information to employees who may be affected by the threat.

### **Local Warning Point or Police Communication Center**

The City’s Primary LWP shall monitor possible severe weather threats by utilizing all or some of the following sources:

- Local radar
- National Weather Service (NWS)
- RACES ham radio or radio officer(s)
- NOAA weather radio
- Local media broadcasts (radio and/or television)
- TLETS (TX Law Enforcement Telecommunications System)